

DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN

NEW MILFORD, Conn.,

April 23, 1865.

BY

REV. DAVID MURDOCH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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NORTHROP'S GALLERY OF ART.

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A SERMON.

I.

AMOS VIII. 9:10.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.

“And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day.”

II.

PSALM LXXXIX. 19.

“I have exalted one chosen out of the people.”

III.

JER. XLVI. 28.

“Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord; for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet I will not leave thee wholly unpunished.”

Like a thunder-clap out of a clear sky came the intelligence, a week ago yesterday morning, that Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, had been killed by the hand of an assassin. Never, probably, in the history of mankind was there such a sudden revulsion from joy to sorrow produced within so many hearts as that which was caused by those few words, which vibrated through the land—“*The President is dead.*” Conspicuous above all other men on this continent—if not throughout the civilized world—he had been lifted up to an eminent position, to be a leader and governor in the grandest work of the age. The eyes of all men were upon him. The hearts of the good and the just and the true were with him. From the golden censer which contains the prayers of the saints, fresh incense was constantly ascending to the mercy seat in his behalf. And we may truthfully affirm that the death of no other man of this day could have caused such sensation in christendom as did his death. Yes; when Abraham Lincoln bowed his head and gave up the ghost, it was as when the standard-bearer of a mighty host falleth. Is

it at all ~~exaggerative~~ to say: No man had ever so many mourners?

What a week has the last one been to the dwellers in this land! A mighty nation has bent in grief! The sable symbols of bursting hearts have been hung out everywhere! In sack-cloth and ashes what millions have thronged God's altars! Each day has been like a Sabbath! The ways of commerce and trade have been deserted! Men have moved about as though the day of doom had come—stunned and bewildered over the strange thing which has come to pass! God has made the nation to drink the wine of astonishment! We have been as those that dream! And it will be many days yet before the people shall have waked from their trance to the sad reality, that he who has been a prince and a father to them during these years of awful trial is with them no more. It is no small nor common grief which pierces the heart of this people; and it will be long ere that grief shall have spent its force. There is nothing like a common suffering to soften and weld human hearts! The survivors of the wreck: the few of the forlorn hope who come through the breach; the last hundred of the besieged, whose numbers have dwindled from thousands to scores, by being partakers in a common calamity, are forever bound together by a cord of sympathy and fellowship which cannot be broken. And we who have been in the ship during these awful storms, and seen how she has labored and fought the tempest, and after nights of darkness and hair-breadth escapes, has at last come safely through—can we see our good pilot, who has been with us in these perils, and stood at his post so faithfully, and held the helm with such a strong and wise and steady hand, suddenly stricken down and swept from the deck, without feeling that we have suffered a great loss, and without lamenting with a great and sore lamentation?

No. 1. Thank God! it is not in human nature not to mourn in such circumstances. Black is the day that saw him cast down from our midst! Accursed the hand that raised itself against his venerated head! Sad and bitter is the thought that honest, great hearted Abraham Lincoln sits no longer in the seat into which the people once and again lifted him with such glad unanimity. A bereaved and orphaned people mourn and shall

continue to mourn him as for a greatly esteemed and dearly loved father, the like of whom they shall never again look upon ! Yea, he shall have no second place ! Equally with the *first* “*Father of his country*” shall his memory be cherished in the hearts of this and future generations ! We do Washington no injustice when we place by his side Abraham Lincoln—*the Father of a regenerated country!*

How, as in a moment, was our joy turned into mourning ! Justly were we glad in what God had done for us. For we had waited long for the desired consummation. How many times did our host set out for the rebel stronghold, only to turn back unsuccessful and dispirited. The last and greatest campaign had accomplished nearly a year of varied fortunes and vast expenditure of life and treasure. The Almighty at last had given us a captain of the right temper, a man of iron will, who, having once put his hand to the plow, never looked back. His cool sagacity and tenacious purpose, backed by the abundant resources of a people lavish of their gold and more precious sons to save their country, was at length crowned with triumph. The strong city fell, the rebellious host was dispersed, and the head of the serpent treason crushed beneath the heel of the victorious Grant. Then arose the shout of the conquerors—pæans of praise and loud hal-lelujahs to the God of our salvation. The heart of the President was attuned to the melody which went forth from the soul and mouth of the people. He rejoiced with a joy unspeakable. The nation, with him at the head of it, was stirred as the heart of one man in view of the great deliverance which Jehovah had accomplished for us, and Te Deums and doxologies went up to the heavens as great clouds of incense.

But alas ! Who shall fathom the divine counsels or foretell what a day shall bring forth ? In the very noon of our jubilee, with the emblems of gladness waving in the vernal sunshine, the clouds suddenly return, and the shadow of death cloaks the symbols of rejoicing ! Base treason and cruel malice are permitted to do their work, and the fatal blow descends which is to transform a jubilant people into a nation of weepers ! Is it not indeed, so that the thing has come upon us, which was spoken by the prophet ?

“ And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God,

that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation ; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head, and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day."

An event so sudden and shocking in character, so public, and wide-spread in its effects, so singular and anomalous in American history, of course attracts the largest attention of our inhabitants. We are all eager to arrive at the true interpretation of this sad tragedy, regarded in the light of a providential dispensation, having an important bearing upon the present and future history of our country. In other words, the question presses on the mind of the intelligent christian citizen, what improvement shall be drawn from this latest page of the history of God's providential dealings with us as a people in these latter days ? I shall at the present time endeavor to indicate, in several distinct propositions, what seem to my mind some of the prominent lessons which we are taught by it.

I. *It becomes us to consider the life of the great and good man whom God had exalted to a position of commanding influence, and which has come to a termination.*

For Mr. Lincoln was no common or mean man, estimating manliness according to any just or proper rule. When party heat shall have cooled, and men shall have suffered themselves to look at the man just as he was, without interest, passion or prejudice, they will not have accorded to him less than this. The judgment of mankind will agree in making him high among the greatest who have been called to a part in our public affairs. He did not claim for himself, and no one else that I know of claims for him, great genius, eminent brilliancy of intellect in any one direction, powers of mind such as astonish and fix the gaze of men on the one possessing them. His excellence did not consist in these, but rather in a balanced and symmetrical character, in which every manly quality finds a fair and proportionate development. If there was any point in which, above all others, he excelled, we would say it was in the clearness of understanding by which he was able to apprehend a subject, and

lay it out before the comprehension of other minds. No man ever talked plainer or more convincingly than he. He saw the strong points of an argument at a glance, and kept them steadily before his mind, and put them so transparently and aptly before others that there was no room for misunderstanding or refutation. It was this characteristic of mind, in connection with the fact that he was in the right and thoroughly sincere, which gave him the advantage over his (perhaps) equally skillful antagonist in the memorable political canvass in which, though unsuccessful in securing his election to the United States Senate, yet, through the fame and admiration which it won for him among the people of the country, was, in my estimation, the chief instrumental cause in raising him to the Presidency. Remembering how magnificently he had championed the anti-slavery cause on that high field of gladiatorialship, the people were more than willing to commit their cause into his hands, believing that whatever wisdom and honesty were able to accomplish could be entrusted to none better. And in all his state papers while in power, in whatever he has said or written, although wanting in the grace and rhetorical effect which belonged to the productions of an Everett or a Clay, they bear the same marks of plain, homely, downright common sense. When once he had spoken in a controversy every one felt that there was very little to be said in reply, and, if my memory serves me, there were very few attempts ever made to do so. He had but little polite or elegant learning. His mind was not stored with ancient classic lore, (and we should not disparage these, for they would have been an advantage to him had he possessed them,) but he had studied the history of his country and its government; he was versed in the great controversy in which he has borne so prominent a part in settling. He was honest and conscientious in adhering to the line of right. And he spoke out his earnest thoughts to his plain backwoods countrymen, and by so doing he was raised from point to point of public trust, until he stood on a level with kings and mighty men; and albeit he had split rails and sailed a flat-boat for a living, he was the acknowledged peer of the loftiest of them all.

Who is there to-day who remembers with shame and regret that we have had a man sitting in the Presidential seat, who was once a day laborer and soiled his hands with honest toil? Show

me the man who talks of Abraham Lincoln's plebian birth, and blushes to think that under Democratic institutions, it is possible for one beginning so low, to climb the ladder up to the topmost round; and I will shew you the man, of whom all true, honest and right thinking minds are themselves ashamed, and who does not deserve the honor of living in a land, where sterling worth and honest industry, and upright purposes win the prize, but should be transported to European or Asiatic shore, where men are only *born* great, never *become* so. The life of this man starting from such humble beginning, and by dint of industry and perseverance, reaching such height, is itself, a great sermon preached to the young men of America, and the highest eulogium to the excellence of the institutions, under which they are permitted to live. There is much in the life which has just been brought to such a tragic termination, worthy of our most earnest consideration.

He was one whom God exalted and chose from among the people, to whose hands was to be committed the cause of the people, in the most important and perilous crisis of our history. A man of humble origin, he began by touching life at the lowest point. He knew what it was to be poor, to work hard, and live frugally. Thus he could sympathize closely with the masses of his countrymen, was thoroughly acquainted with their condition, knew well their interests and was fitted to represent them.

He had the simplicity and naturalness of a child. He wanted to go for just what he was worth; there was nothing affected, or put on, which he did not possess. If there ever was any better example of the couplet

“Princes and Lords are but the breath of Kings
An honest man’s the noblest work of God.”

I don’t know where to find it.

God’s patent of nobility was upon him. And the people echoed the voice of God, when they gave him the title of *Honest* Abraham Lincoln.

And just as truly as God raised up Moses, and educated him to be the Leader of his chosen tribes, so was this man trained and fitted by him, to take his place at the head of this people, and guide them forth out of the house of bondage.

And it was in virtue of his intimate fellowship with the people, that he was capable of being a true exponent of their will, neither going too far in advance, nor lagging in the rear, but ever keeping abreast of the popular wave. It was owing to this, under God, that he achieved such measure of success in his work.

Here we may not dwell, however.

II. *In the murder of the late President, we have afforded a signal exhibition of the barbarous, cruel and lawless nature of that sum of all villainies, which has well nigh caused the ruin of Republican institutions on this continent.*

Although there have been and still are good men and women implicated in the system of slavery, who would not afford any countenance to such outrageous crime, yet, it cannot be doubted, that the tendency of the system is to develope a state of society, in which such monstrous growths shall be by no means rare or infrequent. Witness for instance, the numerous murders, assassinations, street-encounters and general insecurity of life which have prevailed for years in the southern states ; the manifold and nameless cruelties which have been perpetrated on Union men, Union prisoners during the continuance of this war ; the common talk of the streets, hotels and railways, concerning the prevention of the constitutionally elected man from taking his seat, by ruthless murder ; the advertisements in some of their public journals setting a reward on his head ; their attempts to waylay and kill him, while passing to the Capitol, in 1861 ! Can any intelligent, candid mind behold such savagery and not start back with horror, from a condition of society which breeds and tolerates such atrocities as these ? With the unburied body of our slain President passing through the land, and his Secretary of State, together with his son, bearing the brutal marks of the dagger and slung-shot, and a knowledge that a like fate was prepared for the remaining heads of government—so that, by one murderous swoop and in one fell night, government should be dethroned, and anarchy and rapine seize the reins, scattering everywhere terror, dismay and devastation. With these exhibitions staring us in the face, in addition to former proofs of its barbarity, shall we still talk in soft and honied phrase about the mild and patriarchal character of the peculiar institution ; excusing, and extenuating its evils as but incidental and foreign, and not organic

in the system itself? Shall we come down again to bargain and compromise with such a horrid beast of prey, who is utterly incapable of being tamed or humanized? Thank God, we have got by that! We have seen the teeth and claws of the monster, too long and too often, to think any more of toleration.—With one voice the people now demand that he be *exterminated*—that slavery be torn up root and branch, and not one shred of the accursed thing left to pollute the soil on which none but free-men should ever have been planted. We are cured, at last, of all compromise with such iniquity; or, if we are not, we deserve to be forever bereft of God, and goodness, and damned to eternal infamy, with the brand of Cain upon our forehead. For at what a vast cost has the Almighty been teaching and educating us up to this point? What further proof would we have that the vile thing is only evil in all its parts and members, and that continually; and the cup of its righteous destruction filled to the brim and running over? No! we can no longer hesitate; we shall put it away far from us!

III. *Can there be any longer a doubt within any believer in a Divine Providence, that the taking away of our executive head, at this time, and the investing another hand with the reins of authority, is almost of the nature of a revelation, as to the policy to be employed, with respect to the leading conspirators in this unholy rebellion, which has drenched the land with blood?*

I know well it becomes mortal man to be cautious how he treads on this holy ground; to beware how he presumptuously affects to put God's voice into God's acts or permissions on such an awful theme; but there is an equal if not greater danger on the other hand—of being deaf and disobedient to the loud commandment of Jehovah. There is such a thing as *Justice* under God's just reign; and woe be to that people who forget this.—“The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground,” was God's voice out of the heavens. Can we hear no such words, to-day, coming from the Lord God, who reigns on high? Does no voice of blood of brethren ascend from our soil into the ear of the Lord of hosts? And if *He* hears that voice and commands us to pause and listen, also, shall we be guiltless, if we fail to give heed to his warning? Saul was de-

throned and set aside for another man because he spared Agog alive, contrary to God's command ; and God's prophet Samuel when he went to announce the sentence of deposition to Saul, in his righteous indignation against such disobedience, and full of zeal for God's justice, took a sword and hewed Agog to pieces. Is there no lesson here for rulers, who are in danger of pursuing forbearance until it ceases to be a virtue, and becomes a crime, instead, and of bearing the sword, put into their hands, in vain ? Will our all clemency ever be a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well ?

Let us beware of the leaven of a false theology here ; a system which ignores justice and speaks only of mercy ; which sees no suffering God atoning for sin, and thus makes sin but a trifling affair. For were we not on the brink of such a fatal gulf ?—Good as our late President was, may not this have been his greatest defect—the disposition to shrink from punishment of deserved crime, leaning too much to the side of mercy, and thus bearing the sword in vain. I do not affirm, absolutely, that this was so. I claim no infallible power wherewith to interpret the divine acts ; but, on studying this matter in these intervening days, examining it in the light of God's book of providence and his book of redemption, I must say, that it seems very like a motion of God's providence to this effect ; and the conviction that it is so, only grows the stronger the more it is pondered. It is said, that the proclamation of a general amnesty was already prepared and ready for promulgation—that liberty to leave the country was given to certain leading insurgents, on the very day, on the evening of which, the fatal bullet was sped. And if these things were so, it looks very much as though God had said, “Nay ! my servant Abraham. Thy work for me on earth is done—well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in that which I have committed unto thee ; but I have no longer need of thee there—enter into thy rest and joy”—I have another servant, ready to take thy place.”

Neither is it in any spirit of vengeance or cruelty that we would interpret this signal interposition of the divine hand. There is but small danger of our government or people taking any unholy delight in the sufferings of their enemies. There has

been no such disposition manifested hitherto, notwithstanding there has never been so great provocation toward such a feeling. Never have enemies been treated with such leniency and magnanimity since men warred with each other. The North has been merciful and forbearing to a fault. The word tyrant and oppressor has been used respecting Mr. Lincoln, but men never believed in what they said when thus speaking. The thing itself has never been seen among us. For examples of despotic tyranny, cruelty and lawless crimes, we must go over to the other side. Notwithstanding the many and signal proofs of treason which have appeared against thousands; proofs which would have been swift to have brought heads to the block in any other country, the first drop of blood has yet to be shed by the federal government of those convicted of this crime, or by an indignant people, impatient at a tardy justice, and taking the law into their own hands. Is there any danger in such a people erring on the side of vengeance? Do they need to be exhorted to acts of clemency and mercy, or to be reminded that mercy herself is degraded from her heaven-born position when unsupported by justice? That God who is merciful and compassionate above all other beings, is at the same time most just. That while he forgiveth iniquity, transgression and sin, he will by no means spare the guilty, except in conformity with the claims of justice.

And what although final pacification be delayed thereby? Have we forgotten our own oft-expressed wish that when the settlement comes to be a *right* settlement—a complete and perfect adjustment, once and forever, of the matters in dispute—that there be no more patching and curing lightly the hurt of the nation, but that the knife be driven into the bottom of the wound, and the poison wholly scraped out? Is it a time now to cease to remember so essential and vital a treatment of our nation's disorder? Is this to do justice to the memory of our slain heroes?

Let us make thorough work rather. Let us be influenced with a holy jealousy, lest love and longing for peace betray us into weak or unwise measures, which will only bring back our pains and open again our too hastily closed wounds. Let us remember the heavy bonds under which we have come since April, '61, to *finish* this thing.

IV. *In our national grief and lamentation over the sudden fall of our Chief, we need to guard against any despondency as to the fate of the Republic, and distrust of God's power and willingness to bring us safely through all our troubles.*

After such an experience as has been ours for the last four years, to despair of God's help, while going onward and doing right, is the greatest of crimes. As clear as to Israel of old comes the voice of Jehovah from the thick clouds, to this people: "Fear not, O Jacob my servant: for I am with thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations; but I will not make a full end of thee."

What hath God wrought? No fiction so strange as the facts which God hath been setting before our eyes! No mind among us was more thoroughly penetrated and supported by this inspiring truth than the mind of our late chief magistrate. He saw and recognized the outstretched hand of the Omnipotent One over us for good. And it was this divine vision which cheered and held him up in the darkest moments. And could he speak with this people to-day, from his exaltation, it would be with the same truthful and hopeful words, with the same humble and confident faith in God's guidance which characterized his last public utterance, on taking anew the oath of office. Yea! Out of a clearer vision and a more complete assurance of the truth then announced, he would but add emphasis and strength to that inaugural address. O! in our martyred chieftain let this people to-day recognize a prophet of the Lord—speaking to them the very truth of God out of the heavens!

O! what marvellous things hath God done among us! What a history have we been passing through! What a time it is ours to live in! What pulling down and raising up have we seen! What a shaking of elements and overthrowing of foundations! Change! Change! Change! To-day one man up, to-morrow another! I will overturn, and overturn, and overturn, saith the Lord! Where is the man that knoweth the mind of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?

One short month ago who could have foretold that Richmond would have fallen, Lee be a prisoner of war, and his host dispersed and vanquished—Jefferson Davis a fugitive on the face of

the earth—and Abraham Lincoln a sheeted corpse, borne amid the tears and sobs of a mourning nation to his Western grave?

What do these wondrous things mean? “Be still, and know that I am God.”

O let our confidence be this—

The Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge!

Let there be no despair in our grief. In wisdom and love God hath done this. Every succeeding step in the tragic scene but reveals divine justice, wisdom and grace. The false fabric built on lies, and framed in iniquity, is overthrown. Babylon is fallen. The gigantic criminals are wretched vagabonds beneath the full blaze of God’s just eye of vengeance; and although the man exalted by Him, and chosen out of the people, is here no more, God has translated him to nobler seats and services.

Yes! let us thank God for it. better, far better, is it to-day to have our noble martyred dead President bearing such a record than to have a living, flying, perjured, traitorous and blood-stained fugitive, such as he is who yet breathes the breath of life amid the ruin and wreck of his vaunted confederacy!

We are willing to let Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis go down together to posterity, and let the people judge them. We rejoice that He who sitteth supreme in the heavens is the true and righteous Judge, and will strike the balances between them both.

In the day of righteous settlement, we have no fears that *Abraham Lincoln, true, just, honest Abraham Lincoln* will be found wanting.

“ O slow to unite and swift to spare
Gentle, and merciful, and just
Who in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a nation’s trust

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done; the bond are free;
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose noblest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life ; its bloody close
 Hath placed thee with the sons of light
 Among the noble host of those
 Who perished in the cause of right.

Low in the dust our martyred chieftain may lie,
 His fame immortal, now shall never die ;
 The name of Washington has found a peer,
 Father and Saviour hence we both revere.

V. *If there was wanting any event to complete the demonstration of the last four years, that the American people are a nation, and not a mere Confederation of States, and that the government founded by our sires possesses the elements of durability, this last act in the tragedy of blood has supplied it.*

How sublimely have the hopes and vaticinations of tyrants and aristocrats been cast down ! O, ye titled names, ye crowns and mitered heads, where now are your prophecies ? And thou thundering London Times, art thou not proved a false and vaunting blusterer, made to lie down in the dust and eat thy lying words ? Where now is the wise man—where is the scribe—where the disputer of this world ? He who hath held us in his right hand has made the diviners of the old world mad ! He hath taken the wise in their own craftiness ! Who will believe these proud prognosticators now ?

Republican institutions lack stability, do they ? The model Republic is but an experiment, is it ? When the strain and rack of the storm comes, like a weak-timbered, top-heavy ship she will go down, will she ? Now, now, take your answer !—Your airy theories have had their trial ! Whew, when did ship of state encounter such tempests, live through such hurricanes, or come forth more proudly from the seething waters ?

Look at the vessel whom you expected would be, long ere this, but a shattered hulk, drifting like a log on the tide. Yea ! see her and tremble for your own thrones and coronets ! She rides the billow buoyant, erect, triumphant, not a sail, or mast, or spar lost ! From her peak floats the same flag with which she sailed into the fight ! Every stripe is still there. Count the stars, you will find not one vanished ! On their field of blue, like the stars

of the firmament, they are shining out with fresh lustre and glory before the eyes of the nations !

Yes ! look at that banner ! We always ~~were~~ proud of it—we are prouder than ever of it now ! It had a glorious meaning before—for it was the flag which waved over the heroes of Bunker Hill, and Yorktown and Saratoga ! It has a deeper significance than ever in our eyes ! Its colors speak a new language to our hearts, to-day ! The Red tells us of the blood of our brave boys and martyred chief, in which it has been re-baptised ; the Blue speaks of the truth and loyalty of the sons and daughters of the Republic, which have never swerved nor fainted during the conflict ; and the White reminds us of the purity, the righteousness, the freedom attaching to the cause of which it is now the emblem ! It is thank God, now, indeed the flag of the *brave*, the *true*, the *free* ! On the distant Pacific shore, on the slopes of the Rocky mountains, on the inland seas of the West, from the Mississippi source down to the gulf, up the coast, over Sumter and Savannah, and Raleigh, and Richmond, that dear old flag now flings out its folds and tells an astonished and admiring world,—*that there is no government on earth so stable, so enduring, so beneficent, as that planted in the intelligence, the esteem, the choice and the affection of the people !* And at this announcement tyranny shall tremble and the people rejoice !

This is the greeting of a renovated and purified American Republic to the nations, to-day ! Abraham Lincoln's blood has consummated and sealed the message !

No ! we are an experiment no longer. The American nation is among the most thoroughly proved and well-tried facts of the world, now. We have gone through the ordeal. The handwriting on the wall is not as some had fondly hoped—“Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting.” Our mission is not fulfilled. God has a place and a future for us yet.

His language to us is :—“Fear thou not, O Jacob, my servant ; for I am with thee. I will not make a full end of thee ; but correct thee in a measure.”

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